

IQBAL'S ESTIMATE OF GURU NANAK

M. Abadulla Farooqi

Before we try to discover Iqbal's opinion about Guru Nanak and his estimate of Nanak's thought, it is imperative at the very outset to give a brief account of the Sikh leader about whom Iqbal spoke in admiring tones. This is necessary to enable the readers to form a complete and comprehensive idea of his achievements and reforms in the domain of social and religious activities.

Guru Nanak was born in November 1448 of the Christian era at Nankana Sahib (Talwandi), district Sheikhpura. This was a time when the Hindus were hopelessly divided among themselves and were dominated by the Lodhi dynasty of Afghans who had established themselves at Delhi. Hinduism had become a set of formalities and ceremonies. The object of the religious formalities was no longer understood or sought to be understood. The Hindus worshipped the elements and incarnations of God in various forms. Even many a Muslim had lost touch with the real being spirit of their revolutionary religion and were going to the mosques as if to repeat certain set of Arabic words without understanding or seeking to understand their import.

Before Guru Nanak undertook the social and religious reforms, the wave of religious revival had set in throughout India. It was not Brahmanical in its orthodoxy. This religious upheaval was heterodox in its spirit of protest against forms and ceremonies and class distinctions based on birth, and ethical in its preference of a pure heart, and of the law of the love, to all others acquired merits and good works. This religious revival was the work of the people, of the masses and not of the upper classes. At its apex were saints and philosophers, a few of whom had passed before Guru Nanak, and those, too, not in the Punjab; though after him, followed a host of them, here as elsewhere. It is established beyond any shadow of doubt that the influence

of higher spirituality of these movements was not confined to this and that class but permeated deep through all strata of society, high and low, Muslims and Hindus alike. In northern and eastern India a similar movement manifested itself much at the same time. Guru Nanak stirred up the Punjab to rise and made a supreme efforts to reform Hinduism under the impact of Islam.

Rama Nand, Kabir, Tulsi Dass, Sur Dass, Rohi Dass, and Jaya Dev, contributed each in his own way to the work of spiritual enlightenment. Thus, before Guru Nanak's birth, comparatively few of these saints flourished to make any substantial and lasting improvement in the masses, but the current of religious reforms were not withstanding there.

It is, thus, evident that in the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Hindu mind was no longer stagnant or retrogressive. It had been aroused to assimilate new developments. "Rama Nand and Gorakh had preached religious equality and Kabir had denounced images. They appear to have been so much impressed with the nothingness of worldly life that they deemed the amelioration of man's social condition as unworthy of a thought. They aimed chiefly at emancipation from priestcraft or from the grossness of idolatry and polytheism. They formed pious association of contented quietists or they gave themselves up to the contemplation of futurity in the hope of approaching bliss, rather than called upon the people to throw aside every social as well as religious trammel and to arise a new people, freed from the debasing corruption of ages. They perfected forms of dissent, rather than planted the germs of nation and their sets remain to this day as they left them."⁵⁰

It was reserved for Guru Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor, "Gowind", to fire the mind of his countrymen with a new nationality and to give

⁵⁰ History of the Sikhs by Cunningham, p. 48

practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes and aspirations.

Such were the times when Guru Nanak appeared and it was given to him to reform the society as he found it. As pointed above, political lawlessness, social confusion, religious corruption, moral degradation and spiritual slavery were the order of the day. No doubt, Rama Nand, Gorakh and Kabir had already introduced reforms in northern India to rise the people from the spiritual lethargy; but they utterly failed to perceive the true principles of reform. That Guru Nanak succeeded in bringing about the much needed reform is sufficiently clear from the History of Sikhs and the history of Punjab by late Syed Muhammad Latif.

Iqbal seems to be deeply impressed by Nanak's humanitarian principles and broader outlook of religion. He sings in praise of him:

نانک

قوم نے پیغام گوتم کی ذرا پروانہ کی

قدر پہچانی نہ اپنے گوہر یک دانہ کی

آہ! بد قسمت رہے آواز حق سے بیخبر

غافل اپنے پھل کی شیرینی سے ہوتا ہے شجر

آشکار اسنے کیا جو زندگی کا راز تھا

ہند کو لیکن خیالی فلسفہ پر ناز تھا

شمع حق سے جو منور ہو یہ وہ محفل نہ تھی

بارش رحمت ہوئی لیکن زمین قابل نہ تھی!

آہ! شودر کیلئے ہندوستان غم خانہ ہے

درد انسانی سے اس ہستی کا دل بیگانہ ہے

برہمن سرشار ہے اب تک مئے پندار میں

شمع گوتم جل رہی ہے محفل اغیار میں

بتکدہ پھر بعد مدت کے مگر روشن ہوا

نورا براہیم سے آذرکا گھر روشن ہوا

پھر اٹھی آخر صدا توحید کی پنجاب سے

ہند کو اب اک مرد کامل نے جگایا خواب سے!

(بانگ درا)

The nation did not pay heed to the message of Gotam;

She never realised the true worth of her gem.

Alas! they were unlucky to harken the real voice of the saint!

As indeed the tree is unaware of the sweetness of its fruit.

He disclosed the real secret of life;

While India indulged in a pride of its contemplative thought.

Her assembly was not Lit by the Light of divine lamp;

The rain of divine grace fell; but her soil was no good;

Alas! India is an abode of sorrow for a low-caste person;

Surely, her heart is blunt to the sufferings of humanity.

The Brahman is still proud of his vanity;

While the candle of Gotam's teaching is burning in the assembly of others.

The idol-house of India has once again become illuminated after a pretty long time;

As if the house of Aazar is illuminated by the light of Abraham.

Again, the voice of 'Tawheed' has arisen from the Panjab;

And thus, a perfect man has awaken India from her dogmatic slumber.

چشتی نے جس زمین میں پیغام حق سنایا

نانک نے جس چمن میں وحدت کا گیت گایا

تاتاریوں نے جس کو اپنا وطن بنایا

جس نے حجازیوں سے دشت عرب چھڑایا

میرا وطن وہی ہے میرا وطن وہی ہے

(بانگ درا)

1. The place where Chishti gave his message to the people;
The place where Nanak sung unity of God;

The place where the Tartars took their habitation;

The place which compelled the Arabs to leave the deserts of Arabia ;

Is my native country — Is my home-land.

From the above quoted verses of Iqbal it becomes abundantly clear and is established beyond any shadow of doubt that he regarded Guru Nanak a monotheist, rather than a polytheist as some European scholars would have us believed.

Iqbal glorifies Nanak for the obvious reason that the latter never gave utterance to the sacriligious idea that he was God. On the other hand Nanak believed himself to be the humble servant of God. God was in him and he felt himself with God. His are, therefore, the outpourings of a sincere, true, tender, sympathetic and devoted heart filled with unbounded love of God. He did not formulate any elaborate system of philosophy like Iqbal. On the other hand, he took the world as he found and began to teach and reform. He taught people as to what they ought to be, not so much as to what they have been or whence they have come and whither they have to go. He loved humanity and wanted to save them from their religious differences. To use the words of Syed Mohammad Latif author of *History of the Punjab*:

"The good Guru Nanak tried to amalgamate the Hindus and Mohammadans by the creation of a new sect which in time merged into confederate feudalism; but these institutions gave way before all the grasping power of Ranjit Singh".⁵¹

Similarly, in his *History of Lahore* he remarks that "Guru Nanak's best endeavour during his long public career were directed towards removing or reducing to a minimum, those religious and social differences which had sprung up between the two great religious sects of India, the Hindus and the Mohammadans, and to a great extent he was successful".

Iqbal is so much impressed with this effort that we hear the echo of Nanak's preaching in his poetry.

در دیر نیاز من در کعبه نماز من

زنا ر بد و تشم من بشیخ بدستم من

"I beseech in the church while I pray in the house? Sad;

I wear a sacred thread on my shoulder; while I hold rosary in my hands.

Again, Nanak's essential character, like Iqbal, was that of a reformer in the best and the truest sense of the word and his religion tries to possess a noble ideal, with social and practical meanings. His object was to raise religion from the lowest depth of polytheism and superstitions of convention and formalities, into which it had fallen and to preach in addition, a nobler doctrine, a pure morality and a more exclusive monotheism. Iqbal, in addition to these fundamental principles of humanity preached the gospel of "self" or "individuality" against the doctrine of absorption into the doctrine of Eternal self. Apparently, this doctrine of self was unknown to Nanak, yet

⁵¹ History of Punjab by Syed Mohammad Latif., p. 3.

he did preach the gospel of self by emphasising the importance of human self as a humble servant of God. He was definitely opposed to the doctrine of pantheism. Unity of God and universal brotherhood constitute the basic principle of Iqbal as well as of Nanak's teaching. They penetrated beneath the crust of observances and conventions and found the root of the matter in the unity of God and equality of men before Him. According to Nanak there is but one God, the Creator, all-pervading devoid of fear and enmity, immortal, great and gracious. It is contended by Nanak that His qualities are beyond reckoning and beyond comprehension. He says "do not fall in useless struggle, worship not other than God, bow not to the dead".⁵²

Both Iqbal and Nanak emphasise the divine origin of man and assert that his good consists in his close association with God. This exactly is what Nanak means by the realisation of God—an idea which Iqbal conveys through his concept of the realisation of self. The nature of God according to Iqbal is self, while according to Nanak it is indescribable, self-existent, incomprehensible, timeless, all-pervading. Both agree that He is the creator and sustainer of the phenomenal world. This conception of Nanak abrogated all petty distinctions of creed and sects, dogmas and ceremonies. The realisation of such a God shatters the sophistries of the theologians and the quibblings of the dialecticians. It clears the brow from the gloom of abstruse pondering over trifles and leaves the heart free for the exercise of human sympathies. Dr. Ernest Truemp, however, takes a different view of Nanak's religion. He says "We should be wrong in assuming that Nanak forbade the worship of other God, on the ground of the unity of Supreme. Far from doing so, he took over the whole Hindu pantheon with all its mythological background with the only difference that the whole was subordinated to the supreme Brahmn. The position of the popular God was thereby, though not openly attacked, naturally lowered, and their service must need appear less important". He further remarks that "It is a mistake if Nanak is represented as having endeavoured to unite Hindu and Mohammadan ideas about God.

⁵² *Rag Sorath*, M. I. Asht Sh. 1-1

Nanak remained a thorough Hindu, according to all his views, and if he had communion with Mohammadans, it was owing to the fact that Sufism which all these Mohammadans were professing, was in reality nothing but a pantheism derived directly from Hindu sources and only outwardly adapted to the form of the Islam."⁵³

Iqbal definitely rejects the view held by Dr. Trump and vigorously holds _Nanak as a staunch monotheist. Thus, the mistaken notions of Dr. Trump do not justify the charges laid against Nanak of believing in the Hindu pantheon. According to Professor Wilson: "The doctrine of Nanak being a mere metaphysical notion was founded on the abstraction of Sufism and Vedant philosophy." "But it is difficult," says Cunningham, "for any one to write about the omnipotence of God and the hopes of the man, without laying himself open to the charge of belonging to one speculative school or another".⁵⁴

The next fundamental principle of Guru Nanak's religion is the brotherhood of man, without distinction of race, caste or creed. Iqbal also denounced caste and racial differences most emphatically to establish equality of man before God.

مٹا کر امتیاز رنگ و بو ملت میں گم ہو جا

نہ تورانی رہے باقی نہ ایرانی نہ افغانی

Submerge with the nation, negating all distinction of race and creed so that neither a Tourani, nor Irani nor Afghani is left.

⁵³ Translation of the *Adi Granth* by Dr. Ernest Trump, German Translator

pp: CI-CII

⁵⁴ Cunningham's *History of the Sikhs* page 101-102

Nanak claimed liberty from prescribed trammels, equality before God and the fraternity of mankind. The practical application of the doctrine thus taught led to the formation of a new nationality. The unity of God and the unity of mankind were the two fundamental doctrines of Guru Nanak. This was Nanak's religion and this he preached to his followers. "One-ness", both of God and of mankind was his motto, and he preached that whereas God is one, it will be the principal source of eternal beatitude for all brethren to dwell together in perfect unity. As God Himself is one, so is He pleased with one-ness. Produce concord and avoid discord; Love all, despise none and produce one-ness, believe in one, love one and one-ness and be one.

That Nanak believed in the transmigration of soul is doubtless true.

"Life is like the wheel circling on its pivot,

O, Nanak! of going and coming there is no end"

He did teach of a previous birth and did connect the present with the deeds of the past. The present life is sure to be followed by another whose nature will be determined by our own good or bad actions. This apprehension of a future birth is what troubles the soul of man and thus it is to get rid of this apprehension, which is a source of happiness to the soul. One enjoys eternal bliss when God is constantly with him. This is the goal of human life and both Nanak and Iqbal are unanimous in holding that this stage can be reached even in this life. However, Iqbal does not believe in transmigration of Soul. Cunningham is wrong in holding that Nanak regarded bliss as the dwelling of the soul with God, after its punitive transmigration should have ceased. For, this stage of union is neither envisaged in Iqbal nor in Nanak's system of religion. Both advocate the stage of association rather than that of a union. According to Nanak devotion to God, meditation of His true name, with a heart full of faith and pure moral deeds, are the means by which the grace of Almighty is obtained and these methods may be adopted by obeying the instructions given by the Guru. Thus, implicit obedience of Guru or Sheikh is shown to lead man's salvation

in the end. Like Iqbal and many other mystics, Nanak emphasises the doctrine of self-annihilation with a view to attain the height of a spiritual self. He positively holds that divine love cannot be excited without Guru and similarly the filth of egoism cannot be removed without him. (*Shri Rag M. I. Asht. Sh. 11*).

Iqbal while following different trends gives expression to these ideas:

اندکے اندر حرائے دل نشیں

ترک خود کسن سوئے حق ہجرت گزیں

(اسرار خودی)

منور شو ز نور من رآنی

شرہ برہمن مزن تو خود نمائی

(زبور عجم)

تا نہ رمز لا الہ بدست

بند غیر اللہ رانتوان شکست

در جہاں آغاز کار ار حدف لا است

این تحسین منزل مرد خداست

(مثنوی پس چه باید کرد)

- (1) Sit for a while, in the Valley of your heart;
And negate yourself; so as to be able to migrate to the divine self.
- (2) Enlighten yourself with the light of divine effulgence;
Do not close your eyes; as this will annihilate you.
- (3) So long you are unaware of the secret of one-ness; You cannot break
the bondage of plurality of Gods.
- (4) The origin of the universe is based on oneness.
And this one-ness constitutes the goal of godly people from the very
beginning.

Yet self negation is not the object of his philosophy.

Thus, Love is a dominant theme of Nanak's thoughts. The eternal bliss or unbounded love of God is included in the principle of *Bhakti*. He explains his conception of love in his following lines:

"O man. ! How wilt thou be released without Love?

Through the Guru's Word. He becometh manifest as pervading all and
exciteth Devotion in them?

O man, love God as the lotus loves the water!

The more it is beaten by the waves, the more its love is excited.

Having received its life in the water, it dies without water.

O man, love God as the fish loves the water!

The more the water is, the more is it joyous and its mind and body are
contented

Without water it cannot live for a moment, the pain of separation from water is so great to it.

O man, love God as the chatcik loves the rain!

The tanks full and the hands green are nothing to it, without a single rain-drop.

O man, love God as the water loves the milk!

It endures itself the boiling, but doth not allow the milk to be consumed.

O man, love God as the *chakvi* loves the sun!

(Without sun) Doth not sleep for a moment, and considers as distant that which is present."

(Sri Rag. M.I., Asht. Sh. II)

The principle of love is taken still further by Guru Nanak who likens the deity to the husband and disciple to the wife. Such a height of devotion and love can only be met with in the Warsi-sect of Muslims and perhaps by far the most of all in the religion of Guru Nanak. His following lines are noteworthy.

"All are the female friends of the Husband, all adorn themselves;

They make their own estimates; but mind, fancy dress is not the proper ode.

By hypocrisy the affection of the Husband is not obtained ; counterfeit, overgliding is miserable.

O God, thus the woman enjoys her husband!

The favoured women, who please Thee. Thou mercifully adornest.

The body and heart of her, who is adorned with the Guru's Word, are with the Beloved (Husband)

Both hands joined she attends and looks out and utters an earnest prayer.

(Sri Rag. M.I. Asht. Sh.2).

Thus, the whole system of Guru Nanak is founded on love, which has been taken to the highest pitch by him. He was by far the greatest preacher of this principle like Hafiz of Shiraz, and love taken out of his religion, the whole fabric must necessarily fall to the ground. Brotherhood and equality of man is one of the two fundamental principle of his creed. In other words, Love for humanity was the religion; so too, unbounded love for God was the principal means of salvation.

The efficacy of prayer and forgiveness of past sins by the grace of God are also the means of salvation, which are acknowledged by Nanak. Prayer must ascend from the sincere and humble heart of man to God and it is sure to be heard.

(Var. Magh. M. 1. Shlock 23)

The last but not the least of all the pure moral deeds. Without purity of life, neither of the above means of salvation are attainable by man. Pure moral deeds are so to say the means to the means of salvation. The remark of Dr. Trump that "in a religion, when the highest object of life is the extinction of individual's existence, there can be no room for a system of moral duties", and his assumption "Sikhism is not a moralising deism", is not true.

According to Nanak, the moral tone of a man's character can never be high unless he scrupulously abstains from a bad company and seeks and frequents the company of saints and mystics. In order to be good and noble man must always keep before his eyes a high ideal of virtue and devotion. Thus like Iqbal Nanak does not believe in formal religions with their rituals.

He was a non-believer of the outer formalities and always showed absurdity and the superstitious character of rituals. Iqbal, though adhered to the formal practices of Islam, denounced all other rituals and formalities which he considered unnecessary.